

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Brett Debruycker-Early Outed CRP to Agricultural Land Classification
Proposed Implementation Date:	Spring/Summer 2017
Proponent:	Brett Debruycker, 1692 6 th Lane NE, Dutton, MT 59433
Location:	Lease #10643, All, Section 22, T24N, R2W
County:	Teton
Trust:	Common Schools

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

CRP contract #1855B containing 420.90 acres expires on 09/30/2017. The lessee, Brett Debruycker, has requested to break these CRP acres. The CRP acres were offered for early-outing due to their relatively high productivity. The tract was last farmed in 1997. The lessee plans to spray the CRP out during the spring/summer of 2017 and then direct seed it to winter wheat in the fall of 2017. The lessee has also requested to fence and rebuild a reservoir dam.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED:

Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.

DNRC-Surface Owner
Brett Debruycker, Lessee, Lease #10643
Ryan Rauscher-MFWP
Montana Salinity Control Association
Montana Audubon Society

2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:

DNRC is not aware of any other agencies with jurisdiction or other permits needed to complete this project.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Alternative A (No Action) – Deny Brett Debruycker permission to break the early-outed CRP and return it to small grain production, fence the new grazing land, and rebuild the existing reservoir dam.

Alternative B (the Proposed action) – Grant Brett Debruycker permission to break CRP acres of the early-outed CRP and return it to small grain production, fence the new grazing land, and rebuild the existing reservoir dam.

III. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- *RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.*
- *Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.*
- *Enter "NONE" if no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.*

4. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE:

Consider the presence of fragile, compactable or unstable soils. Identify unusual geologic features. Specify any special reclamation considerations. Identify any cumulative impacts to soils.

This tract consists of gently rolling to rolling topography. The below table outlines the soil types that will be broke.

Slope	Class	T-Factor	WEG	Estimated WW Yield	Acres	Section
2-8%	3E	5	6	41 bu/acre	110.00	22
2-8%	4E	3	6	30 bu/acre	50.00	22
0-4%	3E	5	6	40 bu/acre	60.00	22
2-8%	3E	5	6	40 bu/acre	170.00	22
2-8%	4E	3	6	20 bu/acre	10.00	22
TOTAL	3E				340.00	
TOTAL	4E				60.00	
TOTAL	BREAK				400.00	

Class 3 soils have severe limitations that restrict the choice of plants and require special conservation practices. Class 4 soils have very severe limitations that restrict the choice of plants or that require very careful management, or both. The letter “e” shows that there is an erosion hazard unless close-growing plant cover is maintained.

The class 3E soils have an expected yield of 40-41 bu/acre for winter wheat and are susceptible to wind and water erosion. These erosion concerns will be mitigated due to the residue produced not being destroyed by the utilization of no-till farming practices. Clearly, the majority of the soils on this tract meet DNRC’s land break requirements.

The class 4E soils have an expected yield of 20-30 bu/acre due to poor quality soils. The class 4E soils have a T factor of 3 which is lower than the required rating of 5. These erosion concerns will be mitigated due to the residue produced not being destroyed by the utilization of no-till farming practices. Clearly, the majority of the soils on this tract meet DNRC’s land break requirements.

Mitigation: By changing the proposed break area to only approximately 162.00 acres, all of the class 4E soils are going to be left in permanent cover. Also, all of the soils with a T factor of 3 have been eliminated from the proposed break area. Minimal impacts to soils are expected from fencing the new grazing land or rebuilding the existing reservoir dam.

The last noted practice types were CP-18B which is which is for the establishment of permanent vegetation to reduce salinity. The reason for initial enrollment in CRP is for increased revenue and due to farming difficulties presented by the utilization of mechanical tillage which destroyed the resided produced by small grain production.

Jane Holzer, Montana Salinity Control Association commented, “Tony – I am responding to the request for information on a CRP breaking on 22-24N-2W State Lease #10643. Based on historical aerial photos prior to and throughout the CRP contract, the salinized area was very severe and it took many years to become vegetated. It would be a mistake to break up too much perennial vegetation to return to annual cropping because the saline problems will return too fast. Instead MSCA is recommending a larger area be retained as shown on the attached map.

The Teton Ridge area where this lease is located has severe saline problems on the North Slope and even worse salinity on the south slope. CRP perennial forage provided an economical approach to remediation on both slopes. It would be imprudent to crop the small acreage between the two saline areas outlined on the map you provided for a short term financial gain. This block could potentially be a candidate to re-enroll in the CRP-CP-18 continuous signup. Let MSCA know if this would be of interest to the Trust and the lessee.” (See attached E-mail).

These concerns have been addressed by limiting the proposed break area to only 162.00 acres.

5. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION:

Identify important surface or groundwater resources. Consider the potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality. Identify cumulative effects to water resources.

There are no documented and/or recorded water rights associated with the tract. Other water quality and/or quantity issues will not be impacted by the proposed action.

6. AIR QUALITY:

What pollutants or particulate would be produced? Identify air quality regulations or zones (e.g. Class I air shed) the project would influence. Identify cumulative effects to air quality.

No cumulative effects to air quality are anticipated.

7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY:

What changes would the action cause to vegetative communities? Consider rare plants or cover types that would be affected. Identify cumulative effects to vegetation.

The existing CRP vegetation is native and introduced species consisting of primarily crested wheatgrass, Basin wild rye, and alfalfa. The tract was last farmed in 1997. The vegetative community will be altered by the reclassification. The conversion of CRP to small grain production will increase the overall productivity of the tract as the current grass stand has very low vigor. Minimal impacts to vegetation are expected from fencing the new grazing land or rebuilding the existing reservoir dam.

A review of Natural Heritage data through the NRIS was conducted and there were no plant species of concern noted or potential species of concern noted on the NRIS survey.

8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:

Consider substantial habitat values and use of the area by wildlife, birds or fish. Identify cumulative effects to fish and wildlife.

Ryan Rauscher, Wildlife Biologist, -MT Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, commented, "I have reviewed the Pondera County DNRC breaking request #10643 that I received from your office 3/20/2017. Any breaking of permanent vegetative cover and conversion to grain production will not be positive for wildlife species in general, and specifically problematic for ground nesting birds, small mammals, upland game birds, mule deer and antelope populations. Given that this parcel is adjacent to native vegetation, converting this parcel to small grain production reduces the wildlife values on a larger scale than just the parcel itself. Because of those considerations I would ask that DNRC not allow the tract to be broken." See attached letter.

These concerns will be somewhat mitigated as the proposed action will remove the permanent vegetative cover, but the residue produced in small grains production will still provide limited cover and food for the area wildlife. Also, 258.90 acres of the proposed break area are now going to be left in permanent cover.

Converting existing CRP acres to agricultural land will decrease wildlife thermal and hiding cover. This reduction of cover may adversely impact various wildlife species including songbirds, upland game birds, waterfowl, antelope, white tailed deer, and mule deer. Agricultural land may provide a limited food source for wildlife species including deer, antelope, upland game birds and migrating waterfowl. No comments were received from the Montana Audubon Society.

9. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:

Consider any federally listed threatened or endangered species or habitat identified in the project area. Determine effects to wetlands. Consider Sensitive Species or Species of special concern. Identify cumulative effects to these species and their habitat.

There are no threatened or endangered species, sensitive habitat types, or other species of special concern associated with the proposed project area. Montana FWP did provide site specific comments regarding wildlife,

(see item #8). At this time, no known unique, endangered, fragile or limited environmental resources have been identified within the proposed project area. The project consists of 400.00 acres of CRP which is only a very small portion of the total uncultivated acres held within Teton County.

Mitigation: Only 162.00 acres of the 400.00 acres are now proposed to be broken up and farmed. Minimal impacts to environmental resources are expected from fencing the new grazing land or rebuilding the existing reservoir dam.

A review of Natural Heritage data through the NRIS was conducted for T24N, R2W. There were three animal species of concern, zero potential species of concern, and zero special status species noted on the NRIS survey: Fish-Sauger. Birds-Great Blue Heron and Long-billed Curlew. This particular tract of agricultural and grazing land does not contain many, if any of these species. This particular tract of CRP does not contain many, if any of this species. If any are present, they may be dispersed into surrounding permanent cover.

With the use of the USDA-NRCS Conservation Plan, minimum cumulative effects are anticipated.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

Identify and determine effects to historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.

Patrick Rennie, DNRC archaeologist, was contacted and he stated that due to the CRP being previously farmed, no historical, archaeological, or paleontological resources would be present.

11. AESTHETICS:

Determine if the project is located on a prominent topographic feature, or may be visible from populated or scenic areas. What level of noise, light or visual change would be produced? Identify cumulative effects to aesthetics.

Since the field is currently in CRP and the surrounding tracts are all either CRP, grazing, or farmed, reclassification as agricultural and grazing land will not affect the aesthetics of the area.

12. DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY:

Determine the amount of limited resources the project would require. Identify other activities nearby that the project would affect. Identify cumulative effects to environmental resources.

The demand on environmental resources such as land, water, air, or energy will not be affected by the proposed action. The proposed action will not consume resources that are limited in the area. There are no other projects in the area that will affect the proposed project.

13. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA:

List other studies, plans or projects on this tract. Determine cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of current private, state or federal actions in the analysis area, and from future proposed state actions in the analysis area that are under MEPA review (scoped) or permitting review by any state agency.

There are no other projects or plans being considered on the tract listed on this EA.

IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION

- *RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.*
- *Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.*
- *Enter "NONE" if no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.*

14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY:

Identify any health and safety risks posed by the project.

The proposed project will not change human safety in the area.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

Identify how the project would add to or alter these activities.

The reclassification to agricultural land will increase the vegetative productivity on this tract. The estimated WW yield is 20-41 bu/acre. In a 50-50 crop fallow system economic returns will vary. The tract is currently cash leased for \$32.50/acre and this cash lease will be extended on the newly farmed acreages.

The current CRP payment is \$33.34/acre at a 44.00% share, but will not be sustained due to the contract expiring on 09/30/2017. Converting these acres to cropland, the Common Schools trust would see an increase in revenue.

Fencing the new grazing land and rebuilding the existing reservoir dam will add to the lessee's ranching opportunities.

16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT:

Estimate the number of jobs the project would create, move or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to the employment market.

The proposed action will not significantly affect long-term employment in the surrounding communities.

17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES:

Estimate tax revenue the project would create or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to taxes and revenue.

The proposed action will increase the tax revenue due to the increased revenue generated in small grain and livestock production.

18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES:

Estimate increases in traffic and changes to traffic patterns. What changes would be needed to fire protection, police, schools, etc.? Identify cumulative effects of this and other projects on government services

There will be no increases in traffic, no changes in traffic patterns, and no need for additional fire protection, or police services.

There will be no direct or cumulative effects on government services.

19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS:

List State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, and other zoning or management plans, and identify how they would affect this project.

The proposed action is in compliance with State and County laws. No other management plans are in effect for the area.

20. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES:

Identify any wilderness or recreational areas nearby or access routes through this tract. Determine the effects of the project on recreational potential within the tract. Identify cumulative effects to recreational and wilderness activities.

This tract of state land is rural and generally has high recreational value. The tract is legally accessible and the proposed action is not expected to impact general recreational and wilderness activities on this state tract.

21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING:

Estimate population changes and additional housing the project would require. Identify cumulative effects to population and housing

The proposal does not include any changes to housing or developments.

No direct or cumulative effects to population or housing are anticipated.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:

Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

There are no native, unique, or traditional lifestyles or communities in the vicinity that would be impacted by the proposal.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:

How would the action affect any unique quality of the area?

The proposed action will not impact the cultural uniqueness or diversity of the area.

24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:

Estimate the return to the trust. Include appropriate economic analysis. Identify potential future uses for the analysis area other than existing management. Identify cumulative economic and social effects likely to occur as a result of the proposed action.

The proposed conversion of CRP to agricultural land will greatly improve the productivity on the tract and increase the return to the trust. The current grass stands have lost their vigor and have very low productivity. This tract was offered for early-outing of the CRP contract due to its relatively high productivity. Therefore, converting this acreage to small grain production will provide the Common Schools trust with an estimated return of \$32.50/acre, due to an existing cash lease. Fencing the new grazing land or rebuilding the existing reservoir dam will allow the lessee to continue returns to the trust by allowing more AUM's to be available for livestock. Fencing and the rebuilding of the reservoir dam is covered under the Lease Improvement Request Form. No other unique circumstances exist.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Tony Nickol	Date: April 24, 2017
	Title: Land Use Specialist, Conrad Unit, Central Land Office	

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Alternative B (the Proposed action) – Grant Brett Debruycker permission to break CRP acres of the early-outed CRP and return it to small grain production, fence the new grazing land, and rebuild the existing reservoir dam.

WITH MITIGATION MEASURES – SEE BELOW

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

After reviewing comments and extensive onsite field review, it was determined that 162 acres of the 400 acres that were requested to be broke meet DNRC breaking policy and can be farmed in a manner that will not add to the salinity conditions of the tract. Therefore, 162 acres are authorized to be broke. The remaining 258.90 acres of expiring CRP will be retained in permanent cover and re-classified to grazing land.

The lessee must work with FSA and NRCS and obtain a Conservation Plan and comply with all sod busting regulations. The proposed action will help meet TLMD objectives by increasing revenue to the school trust.

Other significant negative impacts are not expected.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

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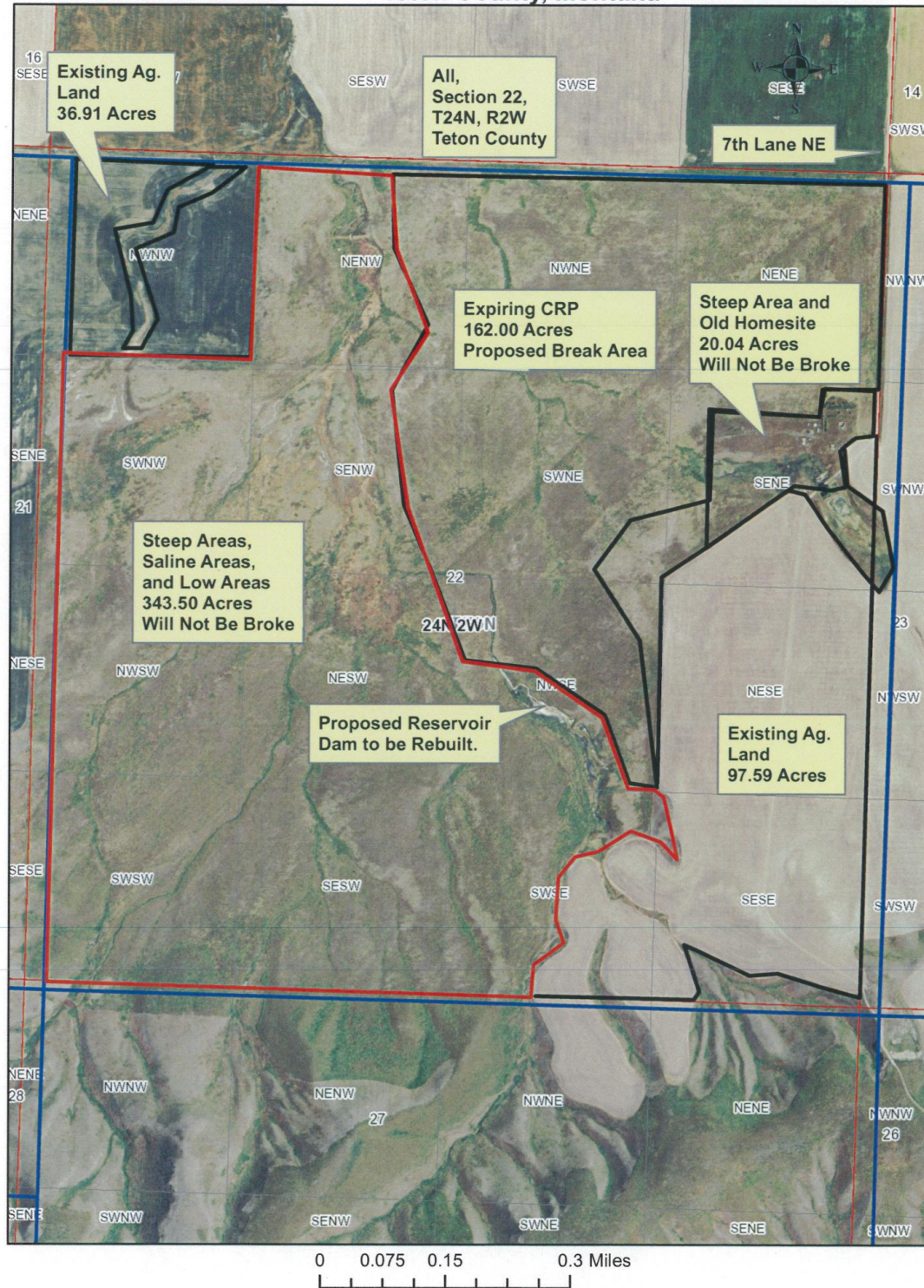
More Detailed EA

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No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Erik Eneboe
	Title: Conrad Unit Manager, CLO, DNRC
Signature:  Date: April 26, 2017	

Teton County, Montana



Nickol, Tony

From: Jane Holzer MSCA <msca@3rivers.net>
Sent: Friday, March 24, 2017 4:33 PM
To: Nickol, Tony
Cc: 'Scott Brown'
Subject: Trust Land - CRP 22-24N-2W
Attachments: Trust Land 22-24N-2W CRP 3-24-17.jpg

Tony – I am responding to the request for information on a CRP breaking on 22-24N-2W State Lease #10643. Based on historical aerial photos prior to and throughout the CRP contract, the salinized area was very severe and it took many years to become vegetated. It would be a mistake to break up too much perennial vegetation to return to annual cropping because the saline problems will return too fast. Instead MSCA is recommending a larger area be retained as shown on the attached map.

The Teton Ridge area where this lease is located has severe saline problems on the north slope and even worse salinity on the south slope. CRP perennial forage provided an economical approach to remediation on both slopes. It would be imprudent to crop the small acreage between the two saline areas outlined on the map you provided for a short term financial gain. This block could potentially be a candidate to re-enroll in the CRP-CP-18 continuous signup. Let MSCA know if this would be of interest to the Trust and the lessee.

Jane Holzer
Program Director
Montana Salinity Control Association
PO Box 909
Conrad, MT 59425
(406) 278-3071
msca@3rivers.net





3/28/2017

Tony Nickol
DNRC Central Land Office
P.O. Box 961
Conrad, MT 59425

RE: Lease #10643 (Section 22, T24N, R02E)

Dear Tony,

I have reviewed the Pondera County DNRC breaking request #10643 that I received from your office 3/20/2017. Any breaking of permanent vegetative cover and conversion to grain production will not be positive for wildlife species in general, and specifically problematic for ground nesting birds, small mammals, upland game birds, mule deer and antelope populations. Given that this parcel is adjacent to native vegetation, converting this parcel to small grain production reduces the wildlife values on a larger scale than just the parcel itself. Because of those considerations I would ask that DNRC not allow the tract to be broken.

Sincerely,

Ryan L. Rauscher
Wildlife Biologist
MT Fish, Wildlife and Parks
514 S. Front. St., Suite C
Conrad, MT 59425
406-271-7033
rtauscher.fwp@gmail.com